Alternative Response
Child Welfare
Benefit-cost estimates updated December 2016. Literature review updated August 2014.

Current estimates replace old estimates. Numbers will change over time as a result of model inputs and monetization methods.

The WSIPP benefit-cost analysis examines, on an apples-to-apples basis, the monetary value of programs or policies to determine whether the benefits from the program exceed its costs. WSIPP's research approach to identifying evidence-based programs and policies has three main steps. First, we determine "what works" (and what does not work) to improve outcomes using a statistical technique called meta-analysis. Second, we calculate whether the benefits of a program exceed its costs. Third, we estimate the risk of investing in a program by testing the sensitivity of our results. For more detail on our methods, see our Technical Documentation.

Program Description: Alternative Response (also called Family Assessment Response or Differential Response) is a system of responding to referrals to Child Protective Services that is an alternative to a traditional investigation. If there are no imminent concerns about a child's safety, the Alternative Response method includes a family assessment, with the goal of engaging a family to determine strengths and needs and plan for the future, without requiring a determination that maltreatment has occurred or that the child is at risk of maltreatment. This is perceived by some as less intrusive and less confrontational than a traditional investigation.

Benefit-Cost Summary Statistics Per Participant

Benefits to:			
Taxpayers	$873	Benefit to cost ratio	$12.07
Participants	$1,917	Benefits minus costs	$2,664
Others	$153	Chance the program will produce	
Indirect	($38)	benefits greater than the costs	88 %
Total benefits	$2,905		
Net program cost	($241)		
Benefits minus cost	$2,664		

The estimates shown are present value, life cycle benefits and costs. All dollars are expressed in the base year chosen for this analysis (2015). The chance the benefits exceed the costs are derived from a Monte Carlo risk analysis. The details on this, as well as the economic discount rates and other relevant parameters are described in our Technical Documentation.

Detailed Monetary Benefit Estimates Per Participant

Benefits from changes to:[1]	Benefits to:				
	Participants	Taxpayers	Others[2]	Indirect[3]	Total
Crime	$0	$49	$107	$24	$180
Child abuse and neglect	$383	$18	$0	$9	$410
Out-of-home placement	$0	$23	$0	$12	$35
K-12 grade repetition	$0	$8	$0	$4	$12
K-12 special education	$0	$49	$0	$24	$73
Property loss associated with alcohol abuse or dependence	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Health care associated with PTSD	$16	$48	$59	$24	$146
Labor market earnings associated with child abuse & neglect	$1,564	$710	$0	$1	$2,276
Costs of higher education	($47)	($31)	($14)	($15)	($107)
Adjustment for deadweight cost of program	$0	$0	$0	($120)	($120)
Totals	$1,917	$873	$153	($38)	$2,905

[1]In addition to the outcomes measured in the meta-analysis table, WSIPP measures benefits and costs estimated from other outcomes associated with those reported in the evaluation literature. For example, empirical research demonstrates that high school graduation leads to reduced crime. These associated measures provide a more complete picture of the detailed costs and benefits of the program.

[2]"Others" includes benefits to people other than taxpayers and participants. Depending on the program, it could include reductions in crime victimization, the economic benefits from a more educated workforce, and the benefits from employer-paid health insurance.

[3]"Indirect benefits" includes estimates of the net changes in the value of a statistical life and net changes in the deadweight costs of taxation.

Detailed Annual Cost Estimates Per Participant

	Annual cost	Year dollars	Summary	
Program costs	$229	2011	Present value of net program costs (in 2015 dollars)	($241)
Comparison costs	$0	2011	Cost range (+ or -)	10 %

This program is delivered as an alternative to traditional child welfare investigations. We used costs for initial investigation or assessment reported in evaluations of Alternative Response in four states: Colorado, Illinois, Ohio, and Minnesota. The program cost reported here is the caseload-weighted average additional cost for alternative response relative to investigation response.

The figures shown are estimates of the costs to implement programs in Washington. The comparison group costs reflect either no treatment or treatment as usual, depending on how effect sizes were calculated in the meta-analysis. The cost range reported above reflects potential variation or uncertainty in the cost estimate; more detail can be found in our Technical Documentation.

Detailed Annual Cost Estimates Per Participant
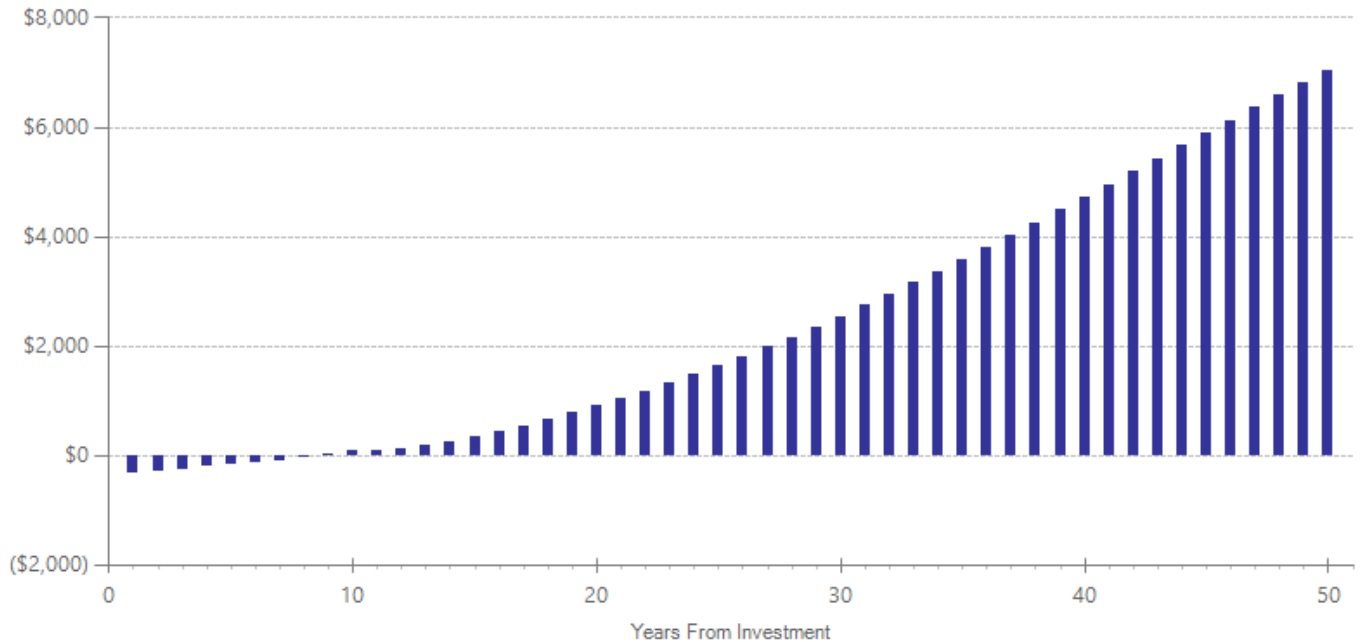
The graph above illustrates the estimated cumulative net benefits per-participant for the first fifty years beyond the initial investment in the program. We present these cash flows in non-discounted dollars to simplify the "break-even" point from a budgeting perspective. If the dollars are negative (bars below $0 line), the cumulative benefits do not outweigh the cost of the program up to that point in time. The program breaks even when the dollars reach $0. At this point, the total benefits to participants, taxpayers, and others, are equal to the cost of the program. If the dollars are above $0, the benefits of the program exceed the initial investment.

Meta-Analysis of Program Effects

Outcomes measured	No. of effect sizes	Treatment N	Adjusted effect sizes and standard errors used in the benefit-cost analysis						Unadjusted effect size (random effects model)	
			First time ES is estimated			Second time ES is estimated				
			ES	SE	Age	ES	SE	Age	ES	p-value
Child abuse and neglect	7	12997	-0.065	0.045	8	-0.065	0.045	17	-0.065	0.145
Out-of-home placement	5	11803	-0.025	0.091	8	-0.025	0.091	17	-0.025	0.788

Meta-analysis is a statistical method to combine the results from separate studies on a program, policy, or topic in order to estimate its effect on an outcome. WSIPP systematically evaluates all credible evaluations we can locate on each topic. The outcomes measured are the types of program impacts that were measured in the research literature (for example, crime or educational attainment). Treatment N represents the total number of individuals or units in the treatment group across the included studies.

An effect size (ES) is a standard metric that summarizes the degree to which a program or policy affects a measured outcome. If the effect size is positive, the outcome increases. If the effect size is negative, the outcome decreases.

Adjusted effect sizes are used to calculate the benefits from our benefit cost model. WSIPP may adjust effect sizes based on methodological characteristics of the study. For example, we may adjust effect sizes when a study has a weak research design or when the program developer is involved in the research. The magnitude of these adjustments varies depending on the topic area.

WSIPP may also adjust the second ES measurement. Research shows the magnitude of some effect sizes decrease over time. For those effect sizes, we estimate outcome-based adjustments which we apply between the first time ES is estimated and the second time ES is estimated. We also report the unadjusted effect size to show the effect sizes before any adjustments have been made. More details about these adjustments can be found in our Technical Documentation.

Citations Used in the Meta-Analysis

Fuller, T., Nieto, M., Zhang, S. (2013) *Differential Response in Illinois: Final Evaluation Report.* Urbana-Champaign: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois.

Loman, L.A. & Siegel, G.L. (2004). *Differential response in Missouri after five years.* St. Louis: Institute of Applied Research.

Loman, L.A., & Siegel G.L. (2014). *Ohio alternative response evaluation extension: Final report to the Ohio Supreme Court.* St. Louis MO: Institute of Applied Research.

Ruppel, J., Huang, Y., Haulenbeek, G. (2011). *Differential Response in Child Protective Services in New York State: Implementation, Inial Outcomes and Impacts of Pilot Project.* Albany: New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

Siegel, G.L., & Loman, T. (2006). *Extended follow-up study of Minnesota's family assessment response: Final report.* St. Louis, MO: Institute of Applied Research.

Winokur, M., Ellis, R., Orsi, R., Rogers, J., Gabel, G., Brenwald, S., Holmquist-Johnson, H., & Evans, M. (2014). *Program evaluation of the Colorado Consortium on Differential Response: Final report.* Fort Collins, CO: Social Work Research Center, School of Social Work, Colorado State University.